

Getting the Right Knead for Your Needs

During the holiday season, it is important to remember to take care of yourself. One of the most popular ways to do this is to get a professional massage. It's surprising how many different types of massage clinics and spas offer these days. A typical massage-therapy menu looks like the beverage list at Starbucks, each type with a curious name touting different benefits for different tastes.

To avoid getting rubbed the wrong way, here is a list of treatments, what each one can do for you, and what you should be prepared for.

Swedish massage. A head-to-toe, soothing rubdown using long, gliding, rhythmic strokes. Purpose is to relax and soothe away aches and pains and to enhance blood flow. Especially good for kinked necks and migraine sufferers.

Sports massage. An intense, deep kneading using targeted movements. Designed to loosen tight muscles and prevent injury after vigorous exercise by moving lactic-acid buildup. For those who don't mind a bit of pain.

Shiatsu massage. An all over probing of the body's pressure points in which the masseuse uses her thumbs, knuckles, elbows and feet to ease away aches and pains. Proponents claim the method releases internal blockages. For those feeling weary and stressed.

Thai massage. A lengthy (often two hour) hybrid of stretching, palm massage and partner yoga. Purpose is to enhance flexibility, release stubborn knots and realign the whole body. For those who want to stretch out taut, overworked muscles.

Hot stone massage. A stress-reduction treatment in which warm basalt stones are placed on tight muscles and pressure points, including between your toes. Purpose is to induce deep relaxation and a profound calm. The weight and warmth of the stones do the work.

Chi Nei Tsang (or Tsung) massage. A gentle massaging of the abdomen starting at the belly button and working outward. Supposed to reduce "build-up of internal congestion" in the body's organs. For those needing to emotionally cleanse and detoxify.

Pregnancy massage. A gentle rubbing of the belly, back and shoulders. Expectant mothers recline on specially designed tables with a hole cut out for their tummies. Designed to relieve the strain of pregnancy on certain muscle groups and reduce stress. Proponents also say it minimizes stretch marks.

-Adapted from *Health*

11-06-02